

# WHAT CONGRESS AND GANDHI HAVE DONE TO THE UNTOUCHABLES

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## CHAPTER V A POLITICAL CHARITY Congress Plan to Kill Untouchables by Kindness

### I

On the 30th September 1932, a largely attended meeting of the Hindus of Bombay was held in, the Cowasjee Jehangir Hall under the Presidentship of Pandit Malaviya. The object of the meeting was to form an, All-India Anti-Untouchability League with branches in different provincial centres. The headquarters of the League were to be in Delhi. Mr. G. D. Birla was to be the President and Mr. Amritlal V. Thakkar, General Secretary. The All-India Anti-Untouchability League was Mr. Gandhi's project. It was inspired by him and was the direct outcome of the Poona Pact. At any rate, Mr. Gandhi adopted it as his baby, the moment it was born. The first thing Mr. Gandhi did was to change its name. In a press message issued on 9th December 1932, Mr. Gandhi told the public that the organisation, would thenceforth be known as Servants of the Untouchables Society. This name also did not appear to Mr. Gandhi as the best. He was searching for another. Ultimately he decided to give it a new name. He called it the Harijun Sevak Singh. Which means a society of those engaged in Service to the Untouchables. This was a natural sequence of the name Harijan by which Mr. Gandhi used to call the Untouchables. This change did not pass off without a controversy between the Shaivas and Vaishnavas. Hari is one of the hundred names of Vishnu, while Har is one of the hundred names of Shiva. In choosing the name Harijan, Mr. Gandhi was accused of sectarian partiality. The Shaivas contended that the Untouchables should be called Harijan. Mr. Gandhi did not yield and as the first fruits of this new organisation the Untouchables got a new name.

On the 3rd November 1932, Mr. Birla and Mr. Thakkar issued a statement to the Press in. which they set out the programme of this organisation and the set-up of the machinery to carry out the programme.

As to the programme the statement said:—

"The League believes that reasonable persons among the Sanatanists are not much against the removal of Untouchability as such, as they are against inter-caste dinners and marriages. Since it is not the ambition of the League to undertake reforms beyond its own scope, it is desirable to make it clear

that while the League will work by persuasion among the caste Hindus to remove every vestige of untouchability, the main line of work will be constructive, such as the uplift of Depressed Classes educationally, economically and socially, which itself will go a great way to remove Untouchability. With such a work, even a staunch Sanatanist can have nothing but sympathy. And it is for such work mainly that the League has been established. Social reforms like the abolition of the caste system and inter-dining are kept outside the scope of the League."

For the convenient prosecution, of the programme it was proposed that each Province should be divided into a number of units and each unit to be in charge of paid workers. A unit may or may not be coterminous with a district. It may be formed by grouping together two districts or two States.

The statement also set out a normal Budget for the year. It was to be of the following dimensions :—

"Not less than two-thirds of the expenditure should be devoted to actual welfare work, the remaining one-third to staff and their allowances. Two paid workers are considered the minimum staff and they should be moving about 15 to 29 days in a month in villages.

Maintenance allowance for two itinerant workers	$30+20 = 50 \times 12 = 600$
Travelling charges for two itinerant workers	$2 \times 10 \times 12 = 240$
Miscellaneous expenditure by and through the workers	$2+10 \times 12 = 240$
Welfare work, i.e. cost of school books, scholarships, prizes, contributions for wells, if any, and formation of Harijan Panchayats	2,000
Total	3080

### **BUDGET FOR THE WHOLE COUNTRY**

We give below a rough idea of the minimum total amount which may have to be spent for the whole of India. The scheme is modest enough in view of the gigantic nature of the work and it should not be difficult for the public to raise the required fund. Every pie contributed to the fund will make a valuable contribution and therefore we appeal to the public to make some sacrifices for the cause. The number of units proposed for each province is only a tentative proposal. The final decision, of course, will have to be taken by the Provincial Boards themselves.

"It is calculated that at least the following number of units will be required to be worked in different provinces, the number of districts and states being

shown against each province :—

Name of Province	No. of Dists.	No. of Units
Assam	11	6
Andhra		6
Bengal	26	15
Calcutta City	1	3
Bihar	16	16
Bombay, Bombay City & Suburban District	1	3
Maharashtra	10	8
Gujarat, Baroda, Kathiawar, Cutch and other States 5 and States 10		
Central Provinces and Berar(Marathi)	9	7
Central India States	11	8
Delhi Province	1	2
Kashmir	1	1
Malabar, Cochin and Travancore	4	10
Mysore & Karnatak Dists. of Bombay & Madras	8	10
Nizam's Dominion	14	10
Orissa Feudatory States 5 + 26 = States		8
Punjab & N.W.F. Province and the Punjab States 32+7	39	10
Rajputana States Ajmer-Merwar State	18	
Br.Dist.	19	9
Sind	8	5
Tamil Nadu	13	8
United Provinces	48	24
Total		184

The expenditure for 184 Units would be $3,000 \times 184 =$	552000
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#### CENTRAL & PROVINCIAL OFFICES

Central Office, $1,000 \times 12 =$	12000
Provincial Offices, $4,000 \times 12 =$	48000

Total	60000
Grand Total	612000
Or say	600000

This amount will have to be made up both from the Central Fund as well as from funds raised by provinces and districts.

It can be seen that a sum of six lakhs of rupees is intended to be collected and spent per year in the whole country for the removal of Untouchability and ameliorative work of Harijans. This programme, particularly if the ameliorative work is to be effective, should continue at least for 5 years. When spread out over 22 provinces, including States and 4 crores or 400 lakhs of Harijans in the country, this is a small budget indeed."

To provide funds for the work of the Singh Mr. Gandhi started an, All-India tour which began on, November 7, 1933 and ended on, July 29, 1934. Total collection was rupees eight lakhs.<sup>24</sup> As the object of the tour was to arouse enthusiasm among the Hindus for the cause of the Untouchables as also to collect funds, Mr. Gandhi did most of the tour on foot. Mr. Gandhi collected Rs. 8 lakhs. With this amount and the annual donation of Mr. Gandhi's monied friends the Singh started its work.

The Harijan Sevak Singh has been going on, since September 1932. It has been, held out as a glorious testimony to the agony of Mr. Gandhi's soul for the condition of the Untouchables and to the passion he feels for their elevation. The General Secretary of the Singh has invited many Americans to the Home of the Singh in Delhi and shown them round as an unrivalled piece of social work that is being done by Mr. Gandhi for the welfare of the Untouchables.

Any welfare work for a down-trodden people must be welcomed by all. But this does not mean that it must never be criticised. That can hardly be accepted. It would be legitimate to inquire what work the Singh is doing since so much is made of it. Any one who has read the Annual Reports of the Singh will see that it follows certain well defined and stereotyped lines. In, the field of education, the Singh has sought to encourage higher education among the Untouchables by instituting scholarships for the Arts, technical and professional courses. The Singh also gives scholarships to High School students. The Singh also maintains Hostels for Untouchable students attending colleges and high schools. The great part of the educational activities of the Singh is taken up in maintaining separate schools for primary stage children, where there were no common schools in the vicinity or where common, schools were closed to them.

Next comes the welfare activities of the Singh. The medical aid which the Singh undertakes to render to the Untouchables falls under this head. This is

done by itinerant workers of the Singh who go in Harijan quarters to give medical aid to the sick and ailing among the Untouchables. The Singh also maintains a few dispensaries for the use of the Untouchables. This is a very small activity of the Singh.

The more important part of the welfare activity of the Singh relates to water supply. The Singh does this by (1) sinking new wells or installing tube wells and pumps for the use of the Untouchables ; (2) repairing old ones; and (3) persuading Local Governments and Bodies to sink and repair wells for the Untouchables.

The third line of activity undertaken by the Singh is economic. The Singh seems to run a few industrial schools and it is claimed that the industrial schools run by the Singh produced a number of trained artisans who have taken to independent living. But according to the reports, more successful and substantial work was done by way of organising and supervising co-operative societies among the Untouchables.

## II

From this summary of its activities an impression may be created that the Singh must be spending quite a lot of money on the welfare of the Untouchables. What are the facts? It will be recalled that the normal amount of money which the Singh expected to be able to spend on the uplift work among the Untouchables was to be about Rs. 6,00,000 per year. How much has the Singh been actually spending ? The Secretary of the Singh in his Report issued in, May 1941 says <sup>25</sup>:—

"During the course of the last 8 years the various branches and the central office of the Singh have spent approximately Rs. 24,25,700 and Rs. 3,41,607 respectively, on the Harijan work. Looking to the needs of the problem, this sum of Rs. 27,67,307 is too insignificant an amount."

On this basis the Singh's expenditure comes to about Rs. 3,43,888 per year, which is 50 per cent. less than what the Singh hoped to collect. It will be seen that the Singh is not as big as it is made out to be by its friends. The Singh has been carrying on a very poor existence. A Budget of three lakhs per year for a population of 50 millions of Untouchables is not a matter on which the Untouchables need be very jubilant. Even this much show, the Singh would not have been able to put up if during the two years that they were in office the Congress Governments in different Provinces had not given large grants to the Singh.

The Singh cannot be blamed for its poor finances. The blame lies with the Hindus. The stagnant, if not the deteriorating, condition of the Singh shows how little the Hindus care for the welfare of the Untouchables. For political purposes they contributed one crore of Rupees which went to make up the

Tilak Swaraj Fund. For General Welfare work they have very recently contributed one crore and 15 lakhs which will make up the Kasturba Memorial Fund. Compared with these the contributions made by the Hindus to the Harijan Sevak Singh are paltry.

One may differ with the Singh on the nature of the welfare work it does. Much of the work the Singh does is obviously the work which any civilized Government is bound to undertake out of public revenues. It may well be asked: why should the Singh ask Government to undertake this work and use its funds on projects which Government does not do and yet is urgently required to be done?

This however cannot give rise to feelings of animosity on the part of the Untouchables towards the Singh. It may be admitted that such animosity does exist. This circumstance and its causes were referred <sup>26</sup> to by a writer in the Indian Social Reformer of 14th October 1944. He said :—

"A deputation of Harijans waited on Gandhiji at Sevagram with the request that members of the castes grouped under the head of 'Scheduled Castes' should be allowed representation on the governing body of the Harijan Sevak Singh. Gandhiji is reported to have replied that the Singh is meant to help Harijans and was not a Harijan organisation and, therefore, their request was inadmissible. At the Round Table Conference Gandhiji opposed reservation of seats for Harijans on the ground that they were Hindus and should not be separated from the general body. Subsequently in the Yeravda Pact he was obliged to consent to an allocation of seats for them specially, from the Hindu quota. When the draft formula conceding this came up for ratification before a general meeting in Bombay, over which Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya presided, one of those present pointed out to an impatient audience that it was not necessary to collect a large fund (as Panditjee suggested) to remove from Hindu society the blot of Untouchability and that if each one of those present resolved that he or she (a large number of women were present) would receive Harijans in their homes just like other Hindus, the problem would at once cease to exist. A Bombay business magnate turned to the intruder and remarked quietly: 'You have told them a home truth. None of them is prepared to follow it.' From the first it has struck me that this has been the fundamental weakness of the Harijan Sevak Singh. What is the result? Nearly every beneficiary of the Singh is an ardent follower of Dr. Ambedkar, which is nothing, but for the fact that they share to the full the fanatical and bitter hatred of Dr. Ambedkar to the Hindus. I can give several instances to illustrate this statement. But that would only make matters worse. I think that this may be avoided by associating Harijan gentlemen and women with other Hindus in all important bodies, local and central, thus giving them the decisive

voice in moulding policy. The idea of helping Harijans without associating with them, is contrary to the spirit of social reform. I was associated with the earlier movements for the uplift of Harijans and I never found this spirit of antagonism aroused among the men and women with whom one came in contact. This was because the promoters of the movement—1 have the Depressed Classes Mission prominently in view—were by religious faith and social conviction pledged to avoid all discrimination in their behaviour to members of the Depressed Classes. I think that Gandhiji was not quite right when he said that the Harijan Singh could not admit members of the Scheduled Castes. Dr. Ambedkar, a friend reminds me, was a member of the Singh when it was formed."

I quote this because it gives me the occasion, to explain the causes of the hostility and expose the true character of the Singh.

### III

The writer in the Indian Social Reformer pleads that Untouchables should be associated with the management of the Singh. His statement might lead people to believe that Untouchables were never represented on the Central Board of the Singh. That would be a mistake. The correct position is that when the Singh was started prominent Untouchables in substantial numbers were on the Central Board of the Singh. The statement issued by Mr. Birla and Mr. Thakkar on 3rd November 1932 gives the names of those who were constituting the Central Board. It was announced that :—

"The Central Board has been constituted with the following organising members:—

Sjt. G. D. Birla, Delhi and Calcutta; Sir Purshotamdas Thakurdas, Bombay; Sir Lallubhai Samaldas, Bombay; Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, Bombay; Sheth Ambalal Sarabhai, Ahmedabad; Dr. B. C. Roy, Calcutta, Lala Shri Ram, Delhi; Rao Bahadur M. C. Raja, Madras; Dr. T. S. S. Rajan, Trichinopoly; Rao Bahadur Srinivasan, Madras; Mr. A. V. Thakkar, General Secretary, Delhi."

It will be seen that out of 8 members 3 were drawn from the Untouchables. After my retirement from the Board, the other two namely Rao Bahadur M. C. Rajah and Rao Bahadur Srinivasan also retired. I do not know the reasons why they dissociated themselves from the Singh.

It is right and proper that I should state the reasons why I severed my connection with the Singh. After the Poona Pact I proceeded in a spirit of forget and forgive. I accepted the bona fides of Mr. Gandhi as I was asked to do by many of his friends. It was in that spirit that I accepted a place on the Central Board of the Singh and was looking forward to play my part in its

activities. In fact, I wanted to discuss with Mr. Gandhi the programme of work which I felt the Singh should undertake. Before I could do that, I was called to go to London to attend the third Round Table Conference. The next best thing I could do was to communicate my views to

Mr. A. V. Thakkar, the Secretary of the Singh. Accordingly I wrote the following letter from the steamer :—

M/N "VICTORIA,"  
PORT SAID,  
Nov. 14, 1932.

DEAR MR. THAKKAR,

I received your wire previous to my departure to London, informing me of the acceptance of my suggestion regarding the nomination of Rao Bahadur Shrinivasan to the Central Board and Mr. D. V. Naik to the Bombay Provincial Board, I am glad that this question has been amicably settled and that we can now jointly work out the programme of the Anti-Untouchability League.<sup>27</sup> I wish I had an opportunity to meet the members of the Central Board to discuss with them the principles which the League should follow in framing its programme of work, but unfortunately owing to my having to leave for London at a very short notice, I have had to forego that opportunity. I am however doing the second best namely to convey to you my views in writing for placing them before the Board for their consideration.

In my opinion there can be two distinct methods of approaching the task of uplifting the Depressed Classes. There is a school, which proceeds on the assumption that the fact of the individual belonging to the Depressed Classes is bound up with his personal conduct. If he is suffering from want and misery it is because he must be vicious and sinful. Starting from this hypothesis this School of social workers concentrates all its efforts and its resources on fostering personal virtue by adopting a programme which includes items such as temperance, gymnasium, co-operation, libraries, schools, etc., which are calculated to make the individual a better and virtuous individual. In my opinion, there is also another method of approach to this problem. It starts with the hypothesis that the fate of the individual is governed by his environment and the circumstances he is obliged to live under, and if an individual is suffering from want and misery it is because his environment is not propitious. I have no doubt that of the two views the latter is the more correct, the former may raise a few stray individuals above the level of the class to which they belong. It cannot lift the class as a whole. My view of the aim of the Anti-Untouchability League is that it has come into existence not for helping a few individuals at random or a few selected boys belonging to the Depressed Classes but for raising the whole class to a



higher level. Consequently, I would not like the League to dissipate its energies on a programme calculated to foster private virtue. I would like the Board to concentrate all its energies on a programme that will effect a change in the social environment of the Depressed Classes. Having stated in general terms my views, I venture to place some concrete proposals for work to be undertaken by the League.

### **1. A CAMPAIGN TO SECURE CIVIL RIGHTS**

I think the first thing that the League should undertake is a campaign all over India to secure to the Depressed Classes the enjoyment of their civic rights such as taking water from the village wells, entry in village schools, admission to village chawdi, use of public conveyance, etc. Such a programme if carried into villages will bring about the necessary social revolution in the Hindu Society, without which it will never be possible for the Depressed Classes to get equal social status. The Board must, however, know what difficulties it will have to face if this campaign of civic rights is to be carried through. Here I can speak from experience, because I, as President, know what happened when the Depressed Classes Institute and the Social Equality League launched such a plan in the Kolaba and the Nasik Districts of the Bombay Presidency. First of all, there will be riots between the Depressed Classes and the caste Hindus which will result in breaking heads and in criminal prosecutions of one side or the other. In this struggle, the Depressed Classes will suffer badly because the Police and the Magistracy will always be against them. There has not been a single case in the course of the social struggle carried on in these two districts, in which the Police and the Magistracy have come to the rescue of the Depressed Classes even when justice was on their side. The Police and the Magistracy are as corrupt as they could be, but what is worse is that they are definitely political in the sense that they are out not to see that justice is done but to see that the dignity and interests of the caste Hindus as against the Depressed Classes are upheld. Secondly, the villages will proclaim a complete boycott of the Depressed Classes, the moment they see the latter are trying to reach a status of equality along with them. You know what harrowing tales of harassment, unemployment and starvation, which the Depressed Classes repeated before the State Committee of which you were a member. I therefore do not think it necessary to say anything more about the severity of this weapon and of its dreadful power to bring all efforts of the Depressed Classes to rise above their degraded station to a standstill.

I have mentioned only two of the many obstacles which the League will have to overcome, if this campaign of civic rights is to be successful and the

League will have to have an army of workers in the rural parts, who will encourage the Depressed Classes to fight for their rights and who will help them in any legal proceedings arising therefrom to a successful issue. I am so much convinced by the efficiency of this programme that I have not the slightest hesitation in saying that the League ought to look upon this as primary in comparison to everything else. It is true that this programme involves social disturbance and even bloodshed. But I do not think that it can be avoided. I know the alternative policy of adopting the line of least resistance. I am convinced that it will be ineffective in the matter of uprooting untouchability. The silent infiltration of rational ideas among the ignorant mass of caste Hindus cannot, I am sure, work for the elevation of the Depressed Classes. First of all, the caste Hindu like all human beings follows his customary conduct in observing untouchability towards the Depressed Classes. Ordinarily people do not give up their customary mode of behaviour because some-body is preaching against it. But when that customary mode of behaviour has or is believed to have behind it the sanction of religion mere preaching, if it is not resented and resisted, will be allowed to waft along the wind without creating any effect on the mind. The salvation of the Depressed Classes will come only when the Caste Hindu is made to think and is forced to feel that he must alter his ways. For that you must create a crisis by direct action against his customary code of conduct. The crisis will compel him to think and once he begins to think he will be more ready to change than he is otherwise likely to be. The great defect in the policy of least resistance and silent infiltration of rational ideas lies in this that they do not compel thought, for they do not produce crisis. The direct action in respect of Chawdar Tank in Mahad, the Kalaram Temple in Nasik and the Gurwayur Temple in Malabar have done in a few days what million days of preaching by reformers would never have done. I therefore strongly recommend this campaign of direct action for securing civic rights of the Depressed Classes for adoption by the Anti-Untouchability League. I know the difficulties of this campaign, and from such experience as I have of it I am convinced that the forces in charge of Law and Order must be on our side, if it is to end in success. It is because of this that I have deliberately excluded temples from its scope and confined it only to public rights of a civic nature, the exercise of which I feel Government is bound to protect.

## **2. EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY**

The second thing I would like the Anti-Untouchability League to work for, is to bring about equality of opportunity for the Depressed Classes. Much of the misery and poverty of the Depressed Classes is due to the absence of

equality of opportunity which in its turn is due to untouchability. I am sure you are aware that the Depressed Classes in villages and even in towns cannot sell vegetables, milk or butter—ways of earning a living which are open to all and sundry. A caste Hindu will buy these things from a non-Hindu, but he will not buy them from the Depressed Classes. In the matter of enjoyment, his condition is the worst. In Government Departments the bar-sinister operates and he is denied the place of a constable or even a messenger. In industries he fares no better. Like the Negro in America he is the last to be employed in days of prosperity and the first to be fired in days of adversity. And even when he gets a foothold, what are his prospects ? In the Cotton Mills in Bombay and Ahmedabad he is confined to the lowest paid department where he can earn only Rs. 25 per month. More paying departments like the weaving department are permanently closed to him. Even in the low paid departments he cannot rise to the highest rung of the ladder. The place of the boss is reserved for the caste Hindu while the Depressed Class worker must slave as his underdog, no matter how senior or how efficient. In departments where the earning depends on piece work, he has failed to earn as well as Caste Hindu employees because of social discrimination. Depressed Classes women working in the Winding and Reeling Departments have come to me in hundreds complaining that the Naikins instead of distributing the raw material to all employees equally or in fair proportion, give all of it to the caste Hindu women and leave them in the cold. I have given only a few of the instances of the gross inequality of opportunity from which the Depressed Classes are suffering mainly at the hands of the Hindus. I think it would be fit and proper, if the Anti-Untouchability League were to take up this question by creating public opinion in condemnation of it and establishing bureaus to deal with urgent cases of inequality. I would particularly desire the League to tackle the problem of opening the Weaving department of the Cotton mills to the Depressed Classes as it is likely to make a very large opening for prosperous employment to members of the Depressed Classes. Much can be done by private firms and companies managed by Hindus by extending their patronage to the Depressed Classes and by employing them in their offices in various grades and occupations suited to the capacities of the applicants.

### **3. SOCIAL INTERCOURSE**

Lastly, I think the League should attempt to dissolve that nausea, which the touchables feel towards the Untouchables and which is the reason why the two sections have remained so much apart as to constitute separate and distinct entities. In my opinion the best way of achieving it is to establish closer contact between the two. Only a common cycle of participation can

help people to overcome the strangeness of feeling which one has, when brought into contact with the other. Nothing can do this more effectively in my opinion than the admission of the Depressed Classes to the houses of the\* caste Hindus as guests or servants. The live contact thus established will familiarise both to a common and associated life and will pave the way for that unity which we are all striving after. I am sorry that many caste Hindus who have shown themselves responsive are not prepared for this. During those ten days of the Mahatma's fast that shook the Indian world, there were cases in Vile Parle and in Mahad where the caste Hindu servants had struck work because their masters had abrogated the rules of untouchability by fraternising with the Untouchables. I expected that they would end the strike and teach a lesson to the erring masses by filling the vacancies by employing Depressed Classes in their place. Instead of doing that they capitulated with the forces of orthodoxy and strengthened them. I do not know how far such fair-weather friends of the Depressed Classes would be of help to them. People in distress can have very little consolation from the fact that they have sympathisers, if those sympathisers will do nothing more than sympathise, and I may as well tell the League that the Depressed Classes will never be satisfied of the bona fides of these caste Hindu sympathisers until it is proved that they are prepared to go to the same length of fighting against their own kith and kin actual warfare if it came to that for the sake of the Depressed Classes as the Whites of the North did against their own kith and kin, namely, the Whites of the South for the sake of the emancipation of the Negro. But this thing apart, I think it is necessary that the League should endeavour to inculcate upon the mind of the Hindu public the necessity of establishing contact and social intercourse between the touchables and the untouchables in the way I have mentioned.

#### **4. AGENCY TO BE EMPLOYED**

The League will have to employ a very large army of workers to carry out its programme. The appointment of social workers might perhaps be looked upon as a minor question. Speaking for myself, I attach very great importance to the selection of a proper agency to be employed in this behalf. There can always be found workers to do a particular piece of work or any other for the matter of that if they are paid for it. I am sure such mercenary workers will not serve the purpose of the League. As Tolstoy said ; "Only those who love can serve." In my opinion that test is more likely to be fulfilled by workers drawn from the Depressed Classes. I should therefore like the League to bear this aspect of the question in mind in deciding upon whom to appoint and when not to appoint. I do not suggest that there are not scoundrels among the

Depressed Classes who have not made social service their last refuge. But largely speaking you can be more sure that a worker drawn from the Depressed Classes will regard the work as love's labour—a thing which is so essential to the success of the League. Secondly, there are agencies which are already engaged in same sort of social service without any confines as to class or purpose—and may be prepared to supplement their activity by taking up the work of Anti-Untouchability League in consideration of a grant-in-aid. I am sure this hire-purchase system of work— if I may use that expression—can produce no lasting good. What is wanted in an agency is a single minded devotion to one task and one task only. We want bodies and organisations which have deliberately chosen to be narrow-minded in order to be enthusiastic about their cause. The work it is to be assigned must be assigned to those who would undertake to devote themselves exclusively to the work of the Depressed Classes.

I am afraid I have already trespassed the limits of a letter and I do not think I can err further in that direction without being tediously long. I had many other things to say but I now propose to reserve them for another occasion. Before closing this I wish to say just this. It was Balfour I think who said' that what could hold the British Empire together was love and not law. I think that observation applies equally to the Hindu Society. The touchables and the untouchables cannot be held together by law certainly not by any electoral law substituting joint electorates for separate electorates. The only thing that can hold them together is love. Outside the family justice alone in my opinion can open the possibility of love, and it should be the duty of the Anti-Untouchability League to see that the touchable does, or failing that is made to do, justice to the Untouchable. Nothing else in my opinion can justify the project or the existence of the League. With best wishes and kind regards.

I am, Yours sincerely,

(Sd.) B. R.

AMBEDKAR.

F.S.

I am releasing this to the Press so that the general public may know my views and have an opportunity to consider them.

To

A. V. THAKKAR, ESQ.,  
General Secretary,  
Anti-Untouchability League,  
Birla House,  
New Delhi.

#### IV

To my great surprise, I found that no attention, was paid to my proposals. Indeed, my letter was not even acknowledged! I felt that there was no use in my remaining in the Singh. I dissociated myself from it. I found that in my absence the aims and objects had undergone a complete change. At the meeting held in Cowasjee Jehangir Hall in Bombay on the 80th September 1932 the aims of the organisation were stated to be:—

"Carrying propaganda against Untouchability and taking immediate steps 'to secure as early as practicable that all public Wells, dharamshalas, roads, schools, crematoriums, burning ghats and all public temples be declared open to the Depressed Classes, provided that no compulsion or force shall be used and that only peaceful persuasion shall be adopted towards this end."

But in the statement issued by Mr. G. D. Birla and Mr. A. V. Thakkar on the 8rd November two months after its inauguration it was stated :—

"The League believes that reasonable persons among the Sanatanists are not much against the removal of Untouchability as such, as they are against inter-caste dinners and marriages. Since it is not the ambition of the League to undertake reforms beyond its own scope, it is desirable to make it clear that while the League will work by persuasion among the caste Hindus to remove every vestige of Untouchability, the main line of work will be constructive, such as the uplift of Depressed Classes educationally, economically and socially, which itself will go a great way to remove untouchability. With such a work even a staunch Sanatanist can have nothing but sympathy. And it is for such work mainly that the League has been established. Social reforms like the abolition of the caste system and inter-dining are kept outside the scope of the League."

Here there was a complete departure from the original aims of the organisation. Removal of Untouchability had only a nominal place in the programme. Constructive work became the main part of the work of the Singh. It is pertinent to ask why this change in the aims and objects was made. This change in the aims and objects could not have been brought about without, the knowledge and consent of Mr. Gandhi. The only reason one can see is that the original programme was most inconvenient to Mr. Gandhi. Removal of Untouchability as a platform was very good, but as a programme of action it was bound to have made Mr. Gandhi very unpopular with the Hindus. He was not prepared to court such unpopularity. He therefore preferred the programme of constructive work which had all advantages and no disadvantages. The Hindus did not mind it. Mr. Gandhi could pursue it without incurring the displeasure of the Hindus. The

programme of constructive work had no such disadvantage. On the other hand, it had a positive advantage to recommend it. It had the possibility of destroying the independent movement which the Untouchables had built up and which had forced Mr. Gandhi in 1932 to yield to its demands by agreeing to the Poona Pact by dangling well before them the benefits of the constructive work, a consummation which all Congressmen so devoutly wish. It could make Untouchables Congressmen and most gracefully too. The programme of constructive work had the possibility of being converted into a plan to kill Untouchables by kindness. This as a matter of fact has happened. The Harijan Sevak Singh is intolerant of any movement on the part of the Untouchables which is independent and opposed to the Hindus and the Congress and is out to destroy it. Anticipating that such would be the consequences of the change in the aims and objects, I retired from the Singh.

Since the first batch of the Untouchables left the Singh no attempt was made by Mr. Gandhi to appoint other Untouchables in their places. Instead, the management of the Singh has been allowed to pass entirely into the hands of the Hindus of the Congress persuasion. Indeed, it is now the policy of the Singh to exclude Untouchables from the management and higher direction of the Singh. As will be seen from the refusal of Mr. Gandhi to agree to the suggestion made by deputation of Untouchables<sup>28</sup> requesting him to appoint Untouchables to the managing body. Mr. Gandhi has propounded a new doctrine to console the deputations. He says; "the Welfare work for the Untouchables is a penance which the Hindus have to do. for the sin of Untouchability. The money that has been collected has been contributed by the Hindus. From both points of view the Hindus alone must run the Singh. Neither ethics nor right would justify Untouchables in, claiming a seat on the Board of the Singh." Mr. Gandhi does not realise how greatly he has insulted the Untouchables by his doctrine, the ingenuity of which has not succeeded in concealing its gross and coarse character. If Mr. Gandhi's point is that the money is collected by the Hindus and the Untouchables have therefore no right to say how it shall be spent, no self respecting Untouchable will bother him and fortunately those Untouchables who have gone to him for such favour are just unemployed loafers who are seeking to make politics a source of their livelihood. But Mr. Gandhi must realise that what he says is only a justification for the change. It does not explain what has been the cause of this profound change in the original conception of the Singh. It is pertinent to ask: why at one time he was anxious to have Untouchables on the Governing Body of the Singh and why he is determined now to exclude them?

## V

The writer of the letter in the Indian Social Reformer is right when he says the Untouchables felt no hostility towards the Depressed Classes Mission, Society which like the Harijan, Sevak Singh was also engaged in doing welfare work among the Untouchables. Hindus and Untouchables both worked together in, perfect harmony towards furthering the work of the Mission. The writer is not quite correct when he says that this was due to the Depressed Classes Mission, having always taken care to have on its Managing Committee a certain number of Untouchables. This is quite true. But the reason why there was no hostility between the Mission, and the Untouchables and why there is between the Untouchables and the Singh is quite different. It lies in the fact that the Mission had no political objective behind its work but the Singh has.

It is true that the original intention, was to keep the Singh scrupulously aloof from politics. It was stated in the statement issued on 3rd November 1932 that:—

"The League may be able to carry on its work on a non-party basis, it has decided not to associate itself with politics or religious propaganda of any kind. The heads of Provincial as well as Central Executive will, therefore, have to be very careful in the selection of their active workers. With this object in view it is necessary that all whole-time paid workers of the League should not take part in politics or in any sectional or religious propaganda."

But this pronouncement was respected more in its breach than in the observance thereof. It may be that it was impossible to resist the temptation of using the Harijan Sevak Singh for bringing the Untouchables into the Congress fold, make them accept Congress politics and impress upon them Congress ideologies, especially when the sense of gratitude for service rendered, no matter how petty, would make them receptive for such processes. It may be that it was necessary to make the Harijan Sevak Singh a political manufactory in addition to its being a service station for the Untouchables. To have equipped the Untouchables for their struggle in life and to have left them free to choose their politics would be charity pure and simple. But how long would the Hindus have supported such a charity ? Not very long. There being no sense of sin behind the treatment of Untouchables by the Hindus and no cause for repentance or expiation, the charity on which the Singh lives would have dried out. To prevent this the Singh may have felt that to get continued charity it must show results i.e. to prove to the Hindus that the Untouchables are no longer independent of and opposed to the Hindus in the matter of religion and politics. My analysis of the causes may not be accurate. But there is no denying the fact that the Harijan Sevak Singh



is a political organisation the aim and object of which are to draw the Untouchables into the Congress fold.

I can give only a few instances which strike me as important. The Harijan Sevak Singh holds Conferences of its workers. These Conferences were ostensibly "organised for the purpose of examining the progress of work in different linguistic provinces and for exchanging ideas and experiences." One such conference was held in Poona in the first week of June 1939. It was found that this Conference had planned to pass a resolution asking Government to change the system of voting under the Poona Pact by substituting distributive system for cumulative voting. I have already pointed out how after its surrender marked by the Poona Pact, the Congress insisted upon the adoption of the distributive system of voting and how dangerous it was to the Untouchables and how it would have nullified the Poona Pact. The Congress failed. What the Congress failed to do the Singh took upon itself to advocate knowing full well that it was opposed by the Untouchables. A strange resolution for a non-political body! It is like a drunkard with a red nose trying to convince his neighbours that he is a teetotaller. The Singh was prevented from pursuing the course by a demonstration of the Untouchables.

I am in a position to state that the Bombay Branch of the Harijan Sevak Singh had followed the policy of black listing some of the Untouchable communities residing in Bombay on account of its Anti-Congress attitude. Students from communities which were black listed were refused scholarships and other educational aids. The Mahar Community, which forms the spearhead of the political movement of the Untouchables and has all along fought with the Congress, was black listed and Mahar students were generally subjected to discrimination unless the student proved that he did not share the Anti-Congress sentiments of the Community.

The last instance I would refer to has reference to Mr. A. V. Thakkar the General Secretary of the Harijan Sevak Singh. Mr. Thakkar is also a member of the Backward Classes Board of the Bombay Government. It was established in 1929. It meets periodically and advises Government on matters affecting the Untouchables and other backward Classes.

Mr. Thakkar brought a resolution in the meeting of the Board recommending to Government that scholarships set apart by Government for Untouchable boys should not be given to the Mahar boys alleging that the Mahar Community had become very much advanced in education and was appropriating—or according to him misappropriating—the share of Government funds which ought to be reserved for other Untouchable Communities. The resolution was sent down for investigation of the facts on which it was found. The inquiry showed that the facts were wrong and that the

Mahars instead of being forward were really backward in education as compared with other Untouchable Communities. The resolution was nothing but a political manoeuvre by no less a person than the General Secretary of the Harijan Sevak Singh to punish the Mahars for their Anti-Congress politics.

What does all this show ? Does it not show that the Harijan Sevak Singh is a charitable organisation only in name, and that its real aim is to ensnare the Untouchables, to make them the camp-followers of the Hindus and the Congress and to scotch any movement by them the aim and object of which are to free themselves from the social, religious, economic and political domination of the Hindus ? Is there any wonder if the Untouchables look upon the Harijan Sevak Singh as an abomination, the object of which is to kill them by kindness ?

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